

I. SALUTATION - 1:1-7

All thirteen of Paul's letters begin with the great apostle's name. It was customary in those days to open a letter with the writer's name and greeting, rather than place them at the end, as we do today. Paul identifies himself as a servant and an apostle, and gives all the glory to God by saying that he was called by God's grace (5) and separated unto this wonderful ministry (see Acts 13:1-3 and Gal. 1:15-24).

He immediately states that his ministry is that of the Gospel, which he calls "gospel of God" (1), the "gospel of His Son" (9), and the "gospel of Christ" (16). He states that this "good news" is nothing new that he invented, but that the OT Scriptures promised the coming of Christ and His death and resurrection. (See I Cor. 15:1-4, where "the Scriptures" obviously means the OT Scriptures, since the NT was then being written.) By relating the gospel to the OT, Paul was appealing to the Jewish believers reading his letter.

The gospel concerns Christ: according to the flesh, a Jew (3), but according to God's power through the resurrection, proved to be the very Son of God (4). This proves His humanity and deity, the God-Man Who alone can be our Mediator. What is the purpose of this gospel that cost Christ His life? Verse 5 tells us: to bring all nations into obedience to the faith. When a man truly trusts Christ, he will obey Him and thus prove his faith.

In vs. 6-7, Paul describes his readers, the saints in Rome. They are also "called" by Christ, not to be apostles, but to be saints. Note that A SAINT IS A LIVING BELIEVER IN CHRIST. Only God can make a sinner into a saint! They are also "beloved of God," even though they live in the wicked city of Rome! How wonderful it is that God calls us "beloved" just as He did His Son (Mt. 3:17). Jesus states that the Father loves us just as the Father loves Him (John 17:23)!

In this brief salutation, then, Paul identifies: (1) the writer, Paul; (2) the recipients, the saints at Rome and not unbelievers; (3) the theme, Christ and the Gospel of salvation.

II. EXPLANATION - 1:8-17

Paul now gives a two-fold explanation: (1) why he is writing, 8-15; and (2) what he is writing about, 16-17.

For a long time, Paul had desired to visit the saints in Rome. Their testimony had spread throughout the Roman Empire (8, and see I Thess. 1:5-10), and Paul was anxious to visit them for three reasons: (1) that he might help establish them in the faith, 11; (2) that they might be a blessing to him, 12; and (3) that he might "have some fruit" among them, that is, win other Gentiles to the Lord, 13. Keep in mind that Paul was the chosen messenger of God to the Gentiles, and he certainly would have a burden for the saints (and sinners) in Gentile capital of the Empire! He explains that he had been hindered ("let" in vs. 13) from visiting them sooner, not by Satan (see I Thess. 2:18), but by his many opportunities to minister elsewhere (Rom. 15:19-23). Now that the work was ended, he would visit Rome. Note the motivating forces in Paul's life: I am debtor; I am ready; I am not ashamed!

In vs. 16-17 we have the theme of the letter: the gospel of Christ reveals the righteousness of God, a righteousness based on faith and not works, and available to all men, not just the Jews. Paul explains in ROMANS how God can be both "just and justifier," how He can make sinners righteous and still uphold His holy law. He quotes Hab. 2:4 (see introductory notes), "The just shall live by faith."

III. CONDEMNATION - 1:18-32

We now begin the first section of the letter, SIN (1:18-3:20 - see outline). In these closing verses of chapter 1, Paul explains how the Gentiles got into the awful darkness that engulfs them, and how God's wrath was revealed against them. Note the steps downward that Gentile history records:

1. They knew God (18-20). God had given them a two-fold revelation of Himself "in them" (conscience) and "unto them" (creation), vs. 19. Man did NOT begin with ignorance and gradually work his way up to intelligence; he began with a blazing revelation of the power and wisdom of God, and turned his back on it! God had revealed Himself from the very time of creation, so that MEN WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL ARE STILL WITHOUT EXCUSE! (How God judges such men will be taken up in chapter 2.)

2. They glorified Him not as God (21-23). Vain thinking and foolish reasoning (such as philosophers practice) turned men from the truth to lies. We see indifference leading to ingratitude, resulting in ignorance. Men today bow before the Greek and Roman philosophers and honor their words above the Word of God; but Paul calls all of these philosophies "empty imaginations" and "times of ignorance" (Acts 17:30)! The next step was idolatry, honoring the creature (including man) rather than the Creator.

3. They changed the truth of God (24-25). This word is really "exchanged." They replaced God's truth with Satan's lie! What is Satan's lie? Worshipping the creature and not the Creator; worshipping man instead of God; worshipping things instead of Christ. Satan tempted Christ to do this (Mt. 4:8-11). Note that in Rom. 1:18, the Gentiles "held down the truth," and now they "exchange the truth" for a lie! The truth believed and obeyed sets us free (John 8:31-32); the truth rejected and disobeyed makes us slaves.

4. They rejected the knowledge of God (26-32). These people had begun with a clear knowledge of God (19, 21) and His judgment against sin (32); but now they reached the lowest level of their downward fall: they did not even want to have God in their knowledge! "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

It is sad to see the tragic results of this decline. Scientists want us to believe that man has "evolved" from primitive, ignorant, beast-like forms to the marvellous creature he is today. Paul says just the opposite: man began the highest of God's creatures, but he made himself into a beast! Note the three judgments of God:

God gave them up to uncleanness and idolatry, 24-25

God gave them over to vile passions, 26-27

God gave them over to a "disapproved" (reprobate) mind, 28ff.

God gave them up! This is the revelation of the wrath of God (vs. 18). The sins listed here are too vile to define or discuss, yet they are practiced today around the world with the approval of men! Men know that sin will be judged, yet they take pleasure in sin anyway! Were it not for the Gospel of Christ, we would be in this slavery of sin ourselves. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!"